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EFFICACY AND ENTERTAINMENT IN MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Martial anthropology offers a nomadological approach to Martial Arts Studies featuring Southern Praying Mantis, Hung Sing Choy Li Fut, Yapeese stick dance, Chin Woo, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and *seni silat* to address the infinity loop model in the anthropology of performance/performance studies which binds together efficacy and entertainment, ritual and theatre, social and aesthetic drama, concealment and revelation. The infinity loop model assumes a positive feedback loop where efficacy flows into entertainment and vice versa. The problem addressed here is what occurs when efficacy and entertainment collide? Misframing, captivation, occulturation, and false connections are related as they emerged in anthropological fieldwork settings from research into martial arts conducted since 2001, where confounded variables may result in new beliefs in the restoration of behaviour.

This article¹ outlines the particulars of an ethnographic journey into martial arts to indicate certain implications for the fledgling discipline of martial arts studies regarding efficacy and entertainment in the anthropology of performance.² The notions of efficacy and entertainment, and their correspondence to social to aesthetic drama were conjoined in the 'infinity loop model' in performance studies [Schechner 2002: 68; Turner 1985: 300-1]. My topic is the question: what happens when efficacy and entertainment are confounded in martial arts? I consider various theoretical outcomes including misframing, captivation, occulturation, and false connections, and in the process consider why some martial arts practice seems more like entertainment than actual combat training.

Since 2001 I have researched martial arts in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Guam, Yap, Hong Kong and China. Anthropological fieldwork provides a tool to develop concepts from the ground up [Agar 1996; Davis and Konner 2011; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Robben and Sluka 2007]. My anthropological trajectory, delving into various martial arts in different field sites, is that of a 'nomadologist'. Primary research findings from Southern Praying Mantis, Hung Sing Choy Li Fut, Yapese stick dance, Chin Woo, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and *seni silat* are collected together here to consider problems in the anthropology of performance relating to efficacy and entertainment [Schechner 1994; Turner 1985; 1988]. A frequent question that arises for researchers into martial arts is that of which style is 'the best'. The answer to the question of 'the best' martial art depends on whether the training is for efficacy or entertainment.

The 'nomadological approach', configured here, intersects with ontology, epistemology and methodology [Deleuze and Guattari 2002]. Ontologically, nomadology means not being tied down to style, it concerns *what* is being studied, whether silat, *baguazhang*, capoeira, dance, performance art, martial art, warzone combatives, etc. [see also Downey 2005].³ Epistemologically, nomadology means there is no one particular way to examine a style, whether phenomenological,

Marxist, realist, feminist, or anarchist. In addition to primary fieldwork investigating martial arts, studies of representations in literature, film, and theatre may be included in a nomadological approach to martial arts studies. Martial arts studies' ontology and epistemology is 'nomadic', to experientially 'absorb what is useful', in Bruce's Lee's appropriation of Mao Zedong's precept [Bowman 2013: 18]. Furthermore, the nomadic approach fits methodology, where martial arts studies researchers utilize participant observation, interviews, case studies, life histories, and many other methods drawn from the arts, sciences, or humanities. Nomadology brings martial arts studies together, not so much into a unified perspective, but to provide a conceptual tool for questioning, comparing, and examining what may otherwise appear to be endless disparate materials, styles, aims and objectives.

SETTING THE SCENE

With a lifelong interest in martial arts, my initial impetus towards martial anthropology came from Phillip B. Zarrilli, the external examiner of my doctoral degree, pursued at the National University of Singapore from 2001-2007, on silat and Malay mysticism. I chose Singapore because I wanted to live in Southeast Asia to learn silat, and the Malay language. I ended up living in Singapore for nine years. This provided opportunities for frequent and extended visits to Malaysia and Thailand.

My research was spurred on by the notion of 'performance ethnography', where the researcher joins in and learns a martial art from the ground up as a basis for writing and research [Zarrilli 1998].⁴ The study of *silat Melayu* that became *Shadows of the Prophet* [Farrer 2009] was complicated because the martial art, as I encountered it, was subsumed under the Haqqani, an Islamic religious order of Sufis. I had trained with the silat group in North London from 1996-98, before relocating to Singapore where I caught up with them again in Malaysia in 1999. The Haqqani were part of the Naqshbandi Sufi *tarekat*, a Sufi order of mystics serving powerful Islamic royal families across Southeast Asia. I first learned silat in England from a bodyguard (*hulubalang*) of H.R.H. Raja Ashman [1958-2012].⁵ Granting me permission (*ijazah*) to carry out research on silat, Shaykh Raja Ashman said, 'the most important thing is respect' [Farrer 2009: 18].

¹ This article is based upon my keynote address at the inaugural Martial Arts Studies Conference, Cardiff, UK. References and footnotes have been added and the text has been revised.

² John Whalen-Bridge takes the credit for coining the term 'martial arts studies' in our co-edited volume **Martial Arts as Embodied Knowledge** [Farrer and Whalen-Bridge 2011]. Whilst Whalen-Bridge pressed for 'martial arts studies', I was occupied with 'performance ethnography', now 'martial anthropology' ranged alongside carnal ethnography and carnal sociology as possible routes into martial arts studies [Wacquant 2004; García and Spencer 2013].

³ Preliminary findings were presented at the ASA15 Conference, 15/04/2015. See <https://goo.gl/rYLR8C> last accessed 12/10/2015.

⁴ This was before Wacquant [2004] published his book on the 'carnal' sociology of boxing.

⁵ See <https://goo.gl/69hZEP> last accessed 09/10/2015.

In the West, however, the Haqqani might be considered as a New Age cult. Perhaps they would have been regarded as a 'deviationist cult' in Malaysia, too, had they not been the *tarekat* of the royal family of Perak. Hence the research became a double study, a study of the martial art, but also a study of the Haqqani. At the end of the silat project, although not exactly a 'casualty', I did get fed up [Buehler 2011]. There were too many bitter arguments between the group and the *guru silat*, and there was too much suspicion of black magic, which gave me the creeps.⁶

Early one morning in Singapore I watched a man perform sophisticated martial arts in a local park. Ng *sifu*, in his late sixties, was remarkably agile. This encounter led me to embark on a second ethnographic study of martial arts, commencing in 2005.⁷ Gaining entry, I trained with Ng sifu and his group everyday for 30-months, for two or three hours a day. During the last nine months I trained for an additional two or three hours a day in baguazhang and Hung Sing Choy Li Fut. I trained about 35 hours a week, and wrote field notes for two or more hours per day. Plus I spent many hours socializing with martial artists, so the research was full on, full-time [Farrer 2011].

Prior to research in Southeast Asia I had learned Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu in London.⁸ In other words, I was a martial artist who became an anthropologist, not an anthropologist who became a martial artist. In 1996 I earned a black belt in Southern Praying Mantis, for which I trained for up to five hours a day, for eight years. Following silat, and Chin Woo, I wrote about Southern Praying Mantis, as I retrained Southern Praying Mantis in Hong Kong. For five years I travelled to Hong Kong to visit Li Tin Loi sifu, staying for a few weeks at a time to polish my skills (*chup*, Cantonese slang for 'to tidy up') [Farrer 2013: 148].

Committed to community based collaborative research, I've worked with many generous martial arts practitioners who have acted as interlocutors. Joining the Chin Woo Athletic Association boosted my research because Chin Woo masters and long-term practitioners are research active, and some excellent academic accounts have emerged regarding Chin Woo [Frank 2006; Morris 2000; 2004]. The Chinese language in Singapore has many dialects, including Hakka, Hokkien,

⁶ Additionally, I disliked the knee hyperextension in Seni Silat Haqq Melayu (SSHM) basic stances.

⁷ Besides opportunity and time, I felt that I had written adequately about Malay martial arts, but the majority of the people in Singapore are Chinese, and I wanted to balance out my research with a study of Chinese martial arts in Southeast Asia.

⁸ Sifu Paul Whitrod, U.K. representative of Southern Praying Mantis, generously took me on as a full-time student (disciple) with no charge or ritual. See <http://www.chowgarsouthernmantis.com/instructuk.php> last accessed 10/12/2015.

Teochew, Cantonese and Mandarin. By the time I left Singapore I spoke Chinese and Malay well enough for general interaction, but specialist definitions of deep concepts required more thorough investigation.⁹ Yong Feng was my long-term research assistant in Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Malaysia, and Thailand, alongside Ah Kin, from Southern Praying Mantis in Hong Kong.

Having set the scene, I present the initial conceptual frame via the infinity loop model from the anthropology of performance/ performance studies to introduce efficacy and entertainment, ritual and theatre, social and aesthetic drama, concealment and revelation.

THE INFINITY LOOP MODEL

The Infinity Loop Model developed from collaborative work between theatre director Richard Schechner, and social anthropologist Victor Turner, to combine insights from the *Anthropology of Performance* with acting and theatre resulting in a new academic discipline called performance studies [Schechner 1988; 2002; Turner 1985; 1988]. Schechner theorised how social drama has a positive feedback loop into theatre, and how theatre (aesthetic drama) feeds back into real life (social drama) [Schechner 2002: 66-71]. There are many ways to explain the infinity loop model, and below I'm going to employ an example from silat. First, some basic definitions: 'efficacy' is to achieve results, effect change, possibly via ritual; 'entertainment' is to have fun, give pleasure to an audience, possibly via performance art [Schechner 2002: 71]. Every performance has aspects of both efficacy and entertainment. But what happens if entertainment and efficacy become confused?

Confounding efficacy and entertainment, frame confusion (misframing), results in false connections [Etchegoyen 2005: 78-82; Breuer and Freud 2000: 67-70; Goffman 1974]. To explain 'false connections' an example is helpful. Imagine a table in the middle of an empty room, where a subject is woken out of hypnosis having been told not to cross the room as a post-hypnotic suggestion.¹⁰ Asked to collect something from the table the post-hypnotic subject edges around room, retrieves the object, and returns. The hypnotizer asks, 'Why did you walk around the edge of the room and not across it?' The subject replies, 'It's cold, I wanted to stay near the radiator to keep warm'; or something to that effect. To risk an electrical analogy, error under hypnosis is something like 'crossed wires', where the subject unconsciously offers

⁹ Dr. Margaret Chan has generously shared many insights regarding Chinese ritual and performance in Singapore.

¹⁰ For Freud on hypnosis see Córdón [2012: 211-217].

a false reason for their action. So, if 'efficacy' and 'entertainment' are confounded, this may result in a false connection or cognitive error.¹¹

Another way to address frame confusion and false connections, in anthropology, is with the concept of 'captivation', drawn from Alfred Gell's book *Art and Agency* [1998: 68-72], discussing how an object or an artwork exerts 'agency' to ensnare the viewer in a cognitive trap. 'Healing Arts of the Malay Mystic' illustrated this phenomenon where the paintings of Mohammad Din Mohammad spring alive to help people under spiritual attack [Farrer 2008]. Such notions of 'agency' and 'embodiment' smack of Hegel's [1807] *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The problem with 'embodiment' is what is being embodied? Mystical energy, soul or spirit? Embodiment may cause more problems than it solves in martial arts studies.

Embodiment and agency are *emic* attributions, 'notions from the field', that entered anthropology to become *etic* 'matters of theory', in Gell [1988; 1999 [1996]], and many other writers. That agency is embodied in things is an academic false connection. It is not just indigenous people who experience false connections; academics suffer from false connections too. For Ingold [2011: 28] agency is 'magical mind-dust' and we should forget about it, especially the idea that 'second class agency' could be embodied in things. For Ingold [2011], we don't need a theory of agency in things; we need a theory of life. And the same goes for embodiment. The notion that something is spiritually encapsulated within the person is nonsensical, because we are active beings in the world, creating the world with our every move, word, and line [Ingold 2011, 2007, 2000].

¹¹ This correlation could equally operate in reverse where false connections result in misframing.

Ingold's dismissal of agency and embodiment is fascinating, and in a way I agree with him. However, those who most doubt the existence of agency have probably never had their agency stripped from them. Locked in a 'total institution', a prison or mental hospital, the prisoner/patient regards agency as lost, where structure is bureaucracy encased in concrete and steel [Goffman 1961]. Agency then, is the power to act upon the world, and this sociological meaning needs to be retained in martial arts studies, despite battles in anthropology.

ATHLETICS AND ENTERTAINMENT

Training Chin Woo in Singapore and Malaysia with Ng Gim Han sifu I came to enjoy martial arts practice as a pastime, for theatre training, Chinese opera, health and fitness, acrobatics, and staged community centre performances of Chinese identity [Chan 2006; Lee 2009]. In terms of efficacy, as a practical fighting art, the training was problematic. As mentioned previously, I earned a black belt in Southern Praying Mantis in London's East End, and if nothing else they taught how to fight. One night in Singapore, a senior student of Ng sifu challenged me to spar outside Kampung Glam Community Club. He punched me in the mouth and split my lip. I wasn't going to put up with it, so I flattened him with a ferocious Southern Praying Mantis palm technique known as 'the face'. Yong Feng ran up to me and said:

YF: Oh, no, no, no, you can't do that, you can't do that!

Me: Why not? He attacked me.

YF: No, no, no, you'll make him lose face.

Me: What?

YF: Yeah, you made him lose face.

Ng sifu teaching Howie Fong
in Hat Yai, Thailand



Chin Woo training, as I experienced it, was mostly for theatre, memory work, actor training, entertainment, fitness and athletics. Of course, the training exhibits a marked degree of physical efficacy, yet this is difficult to translate into fighting prowess given the absence of sparring and physical confrontation. At Kampung Glam, Chin Woo practitioners balanced, walked, and ran upon the dancing lion's ball, a sphere of woven rattan about three feet across, a feat of balance at least as difficult as riding a unicycle.

Ng sifu said, 'This [training] is not about fighting, this is about staying fit', about ageing gracefully, and developing and maintaining enhanced physical abilities. Of course, being in peak physical fitness enhances fighting ability, and there are many excellent fighting skills preserved in the Chin Woo sets. Nevertheless, an extreme emphasis on solo set training distracts from the combat skills better learned through drilling movements, sparring and competition.



Li Tin Loi sifu, grinding arm, Southern Praying Mantis

POWER AND EFFICACY

Li Tin Loi sifu is a retired Hong Kong policeman. For Li sifu, martial arts training concerns efficacy, done to develop shock power capabilities to paralyse or kill an opponent. Training in East River Chow Gar Southern Praying Mantis Kung Fu emphasises partner exercises to develop strength, power, speed, accuracy and timing. The body is held rigid during forms practice to harden muscle and sinew. Li sifu is incredibly strong and powerful for a small person, for any sized person, and has developed some strange abilities through his training. Li sifu's teacher, Ip Kai Shui [1913–2004], also had some peculiar attributes. After decades of throat strengthening exercises, Grandmaster Ip Shui's throat came down from his chin at a 45-degree angle. He would invite people to knock on his throat, which made a sound like hard plastic. I couldn't pinch any skin on his arms or back. Profound bodily transformations occur through Southern Praying Mantis training methods that may be referred to as becoming-animal, becoming-insect [Farrer 2013]. Southern Praying Mantis practitioners would say that there is very little theatre in their practice, that it is totally practical, and would be upset with any talk saying their martial art had much to do with entertainment.

ENTERTAINMENT MASKING EFFICACY? YAPESE STICK DANCE

In 2013 I spent a week on Yap, Micronesia, to observe stick dance. Literature regarding the Carolinian martial art, *bwang*, claims that it had virtually disappeared by the 1940s [Lessa and Velez-Ibanez 2002]. Apparently there is no *bwang*, it cannot be seen or found. Fed up with inescapable bed bugs in the hotel, I stayed in a *faluw* [men's house] for three nights, bringing a few bottles of Scotch. An elderly man came and sat in the *faluw*, saying he could not drink very much because he'd had a stroke, but he polished off an entire bottle of Glenmorangie as we sat there talking late into the night. He knew I was an anthropologist, and asked me what I was interested in. I said I was interested in *bwang*. 'Really? Well it doesn't exist, it's gone, everybody who knew it died', he said. I replied, 'Well I don't believe you'. He said, 'Why don't you believe me?' I said, 'Because I saw the Yapese stick dance and to me it's [...] obvious it's right there'.

The muscular definition on the stick dancer's back is pronounced. The poles are long and heavy. Stick dance is serious training for men and women, where a slip of the stick could result in broken fingers. No doubt stick dance is entertaining for the audience and participants. But here the efficacy of a martial art has been disguised in entertainment. So, I'm sitting in this men's house with the elder, and he's drinking whisky, and I'm having a couple of beers, and I said, 'I know you have some of the movements, because I'm a martial artist, and, for example, I know you can do this (showing a Southern Mantis technique)'. He laughed and said, 'Yes, but can you this? (rolling hands)'. I said, 'Yes, I can do this (following the move)'. That evening the Yapese elder



Yapese stick dance

and I went through a hundred different patterned movements, one after another. The Yapese martial art probably does exist, it's just well hidden, because the community is reluctant to discuss it or reveal it to outsiders.

All martial arts evidence the dualism of efficacy and entertainment, where one facet may be seen to predominate over the other, but to develop this further along the lines of the infinity loop model I shall return to *seni silat*.

SOCIAL AND AESTHETIC DRAMA IN SENI SILAT

In *silat*, ritual ordeals (efficacy, social drama) and theatre training (entertainment, aesthetic drama) are combined in a martial art. *Seni Silat Haqq Melayu* (SSHM) had a practice of 'breaking the ego' that exemplifies social drama. The idea is to 'break the ego', to conquer 'the animal within', during a 40-day (or longer) seclusion. In Sufism, the *khalwa* (retreat) is done alone in seclusion, locked up in a room alone, but the millenarian camp in 1999 took a group of Malay and mixed British people out into the Malaysian rainforest to wait for Doomsday (*Qiyamat*) as predicted by Shaykh Nazim [Farrer 2009: 203-204; Özelsel 1996]. The group was isolated for 40-days during Ramadan, to live according to the rules of the camp.

'Verbal mortification' was used to break the ego. *Silat* retreats are brutal, like Bolshoi ballet training. 'Misdirection' played a part, where breaking

the ego is a form of psychological callusing [Spencer 2009]. One evening during the retreat the guru *silat* ordered Siddique to eat lamb soup for supper, because it was a favourite of the Prophet Mohammed. Having fasted all day, the *murid* ['disciple'] tucked in hungrily, but the *guru silat* said:

'Eat slowly'. (Said loudly)

'Eat slowly!' (Shouting)

'Chew your food!' (Angry, repeated once more)

'There: why did you drop it down yourself?' (Gentle; condescending)

'Don't touch the food until you have swallowed what is in your mouth' (Irritated).

[Farrer 2009: 209]

Breaking the ego occurs via the public shaming of verbal mortification. Every little thing, down to the last minutiae of their behaviour is mortified [Goffman 1961]. Given 'misdirection', however, the question is, was the guru *silat* criticizing Siddique, or was the guru *silat* criticizing somebody else through him? The explanation provided was that 'because their ego is not big enough to take it', one person is criticized on behalf of another, where those strong enough to take it bear the brunt of the vituperation for others.¹² But, given such misdirection, nobody in the camp seemed to know who was actually being criticized. Nobody knew to whom the guru *silat* was referring. They wondered: 'Is he telling me off? Of course he's not telling me off, because he is telling off somebody else through me'. This frustrating experience was a hall of mirrors that paralysed the group.

SSHM ended up running a theatre show in England in 2002. The guru *silat* declared that only students from Malaysia, and no British (UK) students would be cast. Again, he travelled to Malaysia, this time for a theatre camp, and brought Malay performers to England to present *Silat: Dance of the Warriors*.¹³ During the one-hour show, performers clashed with machetes in a constant martial arts battle to display the arsenal of *silat* techniques. For the finale the guru *silat* played a prince, and the two warring factions sniffed the royal hand, submitting to his pious authority to heal the rift. Having experienced both camps, and the show, I interpreted this scene using the infinity loop model as kind of wish fulfilment. The social drama of breaking all these egos, of breaking all his students, and of having all his students leave him, only to be replaced by new students to be broken in their turn was symbolized by

¹² One person suffering the blame for another may be a transformation set of Jesus sacrificed for our sins; a notion rejected in Islam where Isa (Jesus) did not die on the cross.

¹³ See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clWkgY53WXM>> last accessed 16/10/2015.

the constant battle. Submission to royal authority was a fantasy wish fulfilment played out through aesthetic performance.

During the silat camps I placed my hands into boiling oil four times to experience the *mandi minyak* ritual. For my first attempt [2001] dull coals heated an oily sheen floating atop glutinous coconut fibre and pulp, yet another time [2007] the flames blazed under the cauldron of sieved oil. Experiencing the *mandi minyak* four times (and only being slightly burned on one occasion), led me to propose the notion of 'occulturation'. I define occulturation as the attribution of occult power to esoteric skills [Farrer 2009: 41, 249-250]. Occulturation pertains to the infinity loop model with the occult on one side, and esoteric skills on the other. Understanding martial arts as simultaneously efficacy and entertainment, social and aesthetic drama, ritual and performance, concealing and revealing is integral to martial arts studies.

SINGAPORE KOONTOW

The next example is from research I conducted in Singapore from 2006-2007. *Koontow* (*kuntao*; Hokkien 'head/fist') refers to Chinese (and Malay) mixed martial arts [see also Davies 2010: 312-317]. The Hung Sheng (Sing) Chinese Koontow and Lion Dance Society is located in Geylang, Singapore's red light district comprised of fourteen streets speckled with lion dance associations, clan headquarters, coffee-shops, legal brothels, illegal streetwalking sex-workers, pimps, massage parlours, guest houses and seedy hotels [Ng 2011; Warren 2003]. Hung Sing fuses Choy Li Fut with Jow Gar, using arm-swinging training methods with the arm extended straight, punctuated with snappy leopard (fore knuckle) fist strikes to the throat and solar plexus. The uniform consists of black and yellow leopard-spotted trousers, topped by leopard-head insignia T-Shirts. Hung Sing is a 'closed-door' martial arts group accessed by invitation only; in other words, they are a 'secret society', what the British colonial officials would have called a 'triad', albeit this group are not to my knowledge involved in criminal activity [see also Boretz 2011]. One of the disciples said this is the best style to learn prior to imprisonment, because the essential self-defence attributes of the art may be picked up in three months - to kill with one blow of the fist. Of course, for the purposes of actual combat, the long arm-swinging method prominent in the forms (entertainment) is rejected for lightening fast leopard fist strikes (efficacy).

During the past few decades Hung Sing has changed, with tough 'traditional' training methods abandoned. Chia Yim Soon sifu, the chief instructor, trained great strength in his fingertips by setting two Chinese stools apart at arms length to do finger press-ups between the

stools with his legs propped up behind on a bar. According to Chia sifu, 'nobody does [raised finger press-ups] anymore' because 'it's too much like hard work'. Chia sifu teaches very precise, nimble footwork. During one class he asked me: 'Do you know how to dance? Do you know how to do the cha, cha, cha?' Usually stern, an amused Chia sifu demonstrated the cha, cha, cha, a sideways turning step, striking out left and right with lethal punches to an imaginary enemy's windpipe.

Studying with Chia sifu brought the withholding and revealing of knowledge into stark relief. Chia sifu would teach the next step only when the student had attained the desired level of ability. Simultaneously, certain applications to the moves were revealed whilst others were withheld until the disciple (*yup moon diji*, lit. 'enter the door disciples') exhibited satisfactory progress. Continuous turning and twisting with precise footwork added to the complexity and sophistication of the moves. Turning the waist doubles the manoeuvres - elbow, palm, palm, elbow - where four blows emerge from one simple turn. Chia sifu went beyond the slavish reproduction of forms to create his own style from fundamental principles in the production of Hung Sing Choy Li Fut.

One evening Chia sifu demonstrated a back fist, knee raise, double seize, and step with downward palm strike. Against this combination, performed by one of the practitioners, he used swatting hand blocks, and two circling kicks, one to the side, and one behind the opponent. The blocks and kicks shadowed the form taught, with the shadowing manoeuvres presented instead of the application. Chia sifu often invited me to show applications. So I demonstrated on a volunteer how to distract the opponent with the back fist to the face (to make them look up and raise their hands), followed by a knee into the abdomen, seizing the head as it drops down, and turning sideways to smash the face into the floor. His eyes widened, and somehow he looked furious, yet amused. This was an obvious, if brutal application to the techniques. With decades of cross training in twenty-one martial arts I saw the application instantly. Despite Chia sifu's creative fusion, in Hung Sing 'traitors' are outcast, and no deviation from the correct form is tolerated. So I wondered why he emphasized the shadow set over the actual application? Why did he teach fancy shadow moves, when the actual techniques are so devastating? Had the correct application been hidden so well that even the masters had forgotten it? Was the avoidance of teaching applications an example of 'false connections' held in the 'captivation' of the slavish reproduction of sets? For Occam's Razor the simplest explanation is the right one, located here in terms of martial efficacy.

BRAZILIAN JIU-JITSU ON GUAM

My latest project concerns Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) taught by chief instructor Sensei Dan O'Connor at Spike 22 Gym, on Guam, and here I can only comment briefly. BJJ is a rough sport, derived originally from Japanese *judo* and *jujutsu*, the later meaning the 'technique or art' (*jutsu*) of suppleness, flexibility, pliancy, gentleness' [Ratti and Westbrook 1973: 347; Green and Svinth 2010: 31-36; Hogeveen 2013]. Rather than kick, punch, or strike, the practitioner will seize, push/pull, and drag the opponent to the floor, pass the guard, and attain a dominant position from which to control and submit the opponent

Positions include the full mount, side control, the turtle, North-South, and the T-bag. Most of the submissions are done from arm bars and from chokeholds although there are a wide array of other submissions including leg locks and wristlocks.¹⁴ Although techniques and drills are sometimes taught at the beginning of the class, most of the ninety-minute session is spent in 'rolling' (sparring), where the practitioners fight each other on the mats.

A United States Territory, Guam is part of the U.S., albeit not recognised as a state and thousands of miles away from continental America. Guam is the largest American military base in the Pacific. Spike 22 is named after the owner's dead pit-bull, and is well known in MMA circles. Policemen train at Spike, including SWAT, Guam Police Department (GPD), immigration, customs, alongside the security services, and the U.S. military, including the National Guard,

Navy, Coast Guard and Air Force. Participants are mostly indigenous Chamorro, Filipino, American, Korean, Japanese and other diasporic people living on Guam. Professional and amateur, foreign and local MMA fighters, wrestlers, jiu-jitsu competitors, and Thai boxers visit from time to time. There is a constant flow of bodies, knowledge and perspectives through the gym. Every day at six or seven in the morning the 'Grey Beard' or 'Old Man' jiu-jitsu class starts.

Cauliflower Culture is one of the brands promoted at the gym, an MMA fighter's brand appealing to wrestlers, boxers, rugby players and others for whom cauliflower ear is one of the 'perils of proximity'.¹⁵ Big, lumpy, cauliflower ears are common injuries in BJJ, and it's said, 'If you're not injured after a year of Brazilian jiu-jitsu, you're dead'. On Guam several fighter brands have emerged including Fōkai, Purebred, and Cauliflower Culture in a celebration of controlled violence with the built-in logic of submission for the subjugated to 'tap out' and signal defeat. If someone applies a lock or choke, the opponent can tap out, and the victor must let go (or possibly face assault charges). According to Sensei Bob Sales, 'PCS', position, control, submission is what jiu-jitsu is about: first attain position, then control, and finally submit the opponent. Gaining position, control, and submission takes effort, and more advanced practitioners take their time, unlike the rough white belts who tend to rush.

Mixed martial arts are hugely popular on Guam with Pacific Xtreme Combat (PXC) MMA bouts regularly held at the University of Guam Fieldhouse.¹⁶ Local denizens, Guamanians, are highly literate in MMA

¹⁴ Unless specifically requested to demonstrate a skill or application, I endeavour to 'bracket off' techniques from other martial arts when conducting fieldwork. I joined Spike 22 Gym on Guam in October 2014.

¹⁵ ASA2015 <http://goo.gl/rYLR8C> last accessed 12/10/2015.

¹⁶ See <http://pacificxtremecombat.com/newpxc/> last accessed 14/10/2015.

Brazilian jiu-jitsu, Spike 22, Guam



and BJJ techniques. Baby Joe Taimanglo, a Chamorro professional fighter has achieved something like pop star status. Vicious Guam school fights viewed on YouTube demonstrate that Guam children have learned MMA and BJJ manoeuvres. Even skills learned by novice and intermediate practitioners may prove lethal in real confrontations. A Guam Police Detective said: 'I don't see arm bars or ankle locks as that dangerous: it's going to be choke holds'. Carl Gargarita was accused of killing Anthony Guiralau on June 14, 2013, using a rear naked choke. During a fight outside a Guam nightclub, over a love-triangle, the victim tapped out, but Gargarita didn't stop applying pressure, possibly because he feared it was not safe to let go.¹⁷ Eric Garner was killed on July 17, 2014, by the NYPD using a rear naked choke, leading to the 'We can't breathe' street protests in New York.¹⁸ So BJJ has proven efficacy on the street and not just in competitive events or the brutal MMA cage or Octagon. An advanced 'grey beard' practitioner, however, a medical doctor, told me that he trains BJJ so that he can eat steak and eggs followed by ice cream, and drink beer without worrying about weight gain. Advanced practitioners take their time, so ultimately even this highly effective street fighting art is conducive to entertainment. As Judkins points out

MMA was the ultimately the product of, and feeds back into a massive entertainment industry. Indeed, most fans' only contact with the art is through its entertainment function as the number of people who actually train in it are relatively small compared to the number of people who watch the competitions and buy the brands, thereby participating in an MMA 'lifestyle' without actually becoming martial artists [Benjamin Judkins, personal communication, 19/10/2015]

CONCLUSION

My research trajectory in martial anthropology includes a decade learning several styles of silat, three decades in Southern Praying Mantis, nine months in Hung Sing Choy Li Fut, thirty months learning Eagle Claw, Northern Praying Mantis, and Shaolin sets from the Chin Woo Athletic Association, a glimpse of Yapese stick dance, and some intense training in Brazilian jiu-jitsu, baguazhang, and xingyiquan. I have continued to practise the martial arts that I have learned while pursuing a career in social anthropology, arising after graduate studies in sociology, psychoanalysis and social psychology. Martial arts research in anthropology has taken me through London, Yap, Guam, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, China and Singapore. Although my professional writing predominantly addresses contemporary issues in social theory from fine-grained often long-term participant observation in particular field sites, this article, based upon a keynote address at the inaugural Martial Arts Studies Conference, provides an overview of martial anthropology, as I have pursued it, to advocate a 'nomadological approach' in martial arts studies. Nomadology is not a quick and easy solution to the lengthy process of ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation and depth interviews, where each study takes nine months of complete immersion just to get started. Nomadology does offer a means to connect martial arts cross-training to fieldwork in multiple sites, to begin asking comparative ethnological questions and to seek similarities and differences in global and regional martial arts practice. Nomadology permits the flow of information, theory, and concepts to emerge directly from the field site where questions arise from the ground of martial arts practice rather than being imposed via external perspectives at the outset of the research.

Efficacy and entertainment, ritual and theatre, social and aesthetic drama, concealment and revelation, work and play are bound together in the 'infinity loop model' developed in the anthropology of performance and performance studies. Performance theorists assumed a positive feedback loop where efficacy flows into entertainment and vice versa. The infinity loop model proved useful for my research in silat, where the social difficulties involved in the religious practice of 'breaking the ego' in silat camps using methods based in humiliation, mortification, and vituperation, led the students to abandon the guru silat, if not Islam and the art of silat. This social drama was symbolically enacted onstage in a theatre production of continuous martial arts machete action between warring factions who reconciled under the Sultan's authority. The reactionary wish fulfilment of submission to divine royal authority is for an end to ruptured interpersonal relationships, but also for a return to the overarching rule of the Sultanate, the Islamic Caliphate, to heal the capitalist class divisions in Malaysia brought about by colonialism, modernity, and globalisation,

¹⁷ The Supreme Court of Guam overturned Gargarita's manslaughter conviction. Retrial is set for January 2016. See <http://goo.gl/VvNQ2m> last accessed 14/10/2015.

¹⁸ See <http://goo.gl/lBhfn4> last accessed 14/10/2015.

and further as a proposed solution to end economic and religious violence in Islam worldwide. Hence the social and aesthetic model, albeit drawn from outside the fieldwork, proved useful to organize disparate happenings, to provide an explanatory framework for what otherwise would be descriptive data or ethnographic narrative. The research in silat inevitably led me to the study of Malay magic, to propose the theory of *occulturation*, meaning ‘occult attribution’ - esoteric skills are framed as magic. Therefore, theatre for some may be framed as ritual for others and vice versa, where one woman’s black magic might be another’s religiosity.

The problem addressed here is what occurs when efficacy and entertainment collide? Misframing, captivation, occulturation, and false connections occur where confounded variables may result in new beliefs in the ‘restoration of behaviour’, where the martial art develops and changes, with strips of martial techniques reconfigured and rearranged, simultaneously referring to tradition in the struggle to control resources [Schechner 1985; Judkins and Nielson 2015]. For Schechner ‘restored behaviour’ is the main characteristic of performance, where restored behaviour is living behaviour that is re-patterned, or rearranged, and reconstructed like a film director would reconstruct strips of film, possibly involving an entire theatre drama, or a single movement, in ritual, shamanism, exorcism or trance [Schechner 1985: 35-36]. Entertainment and efficacy are not polar opposites – the categories seep into one other and permeate porous definitional boundaries. Extended arm-swinging training, for example, is a method of staging fights where the audience needs to see the action from afar, yet this same action over long-term training toughens and lengthens the sinews of the shoulder, enhances the power of the spine and waist, and swells the arms with blood to increase density and the flow of energy.

Martial arts studies must consider the emergence of cultural practice, praxis, via fine-grained ethnographic attention with community participation. Rather than to say ‘enough particular studies’, we should conduct them with renewed vigour. The environment keeps changing, people keep changing, and to have a lens on social change we must continue fine-grained participant observation. Furthermore, our research should have an applied dimension; for example, we may gain access to the police to help to solve cold cases, and/or to help solve injustice perpetrated by the police. That some martial arts practice seems more like entertainment than actual combat training depends upon context and participation. As Shaykh Raja Ashman said, ‘the most important thing is respect’, because all martial arts have an element of efficacy no matter how much they may look like dance or entertainment. Yet we all come across practitioners who consider the martial art they practice as ‘the best for fighting’. This is a false belief, a false connection that results from mistaking the frame for the individual, and mistakes the individual street-fight for the battle to live a long and healthy productive life.

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